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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/04/2016
TAGS: PREL PTER CVIS PGOV IS NO KPAL
SUBJECT: NORWAY RECEIVES HAMAS VISA APPLICATIONS

Classified By: P/E Counselor Mike Hammer, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Norwegian MFA DAS for Middle East Affairs Kaare Eltervaag told us on the afternoon of May 4 that Norway received this morning (May 4) visa applications from two individuals representing Hamas. The applications were delivered to the UNDP offices in Gaza (Note: UNDP represents Norwegian interests in Gaza). The visa applications will be sent by normal processing procedures to the UNDP office in Jerusalem, where the Norwegian Representative Office in Al Ram will collect them. The Representative Office will then forward the applications to the Norwegian Embassy in Tel Aviv. Eltervaag told us that the visas applications will not be adjudicated in Tel Aviv but by the MFA in Oslo.

¶2. (C) Eltervaag said that one of the visa applicants, named Yahya al-Abadza, is a new applicant. In addition to al-Abadza, Salah Mohammed al-Bardawil -- who has been denied a Schengen visa -- has applied. The previously mentioned Hamas traveler Mohammed el-Rantisi has apparently not applied for a Norwegian visa. Eltervaag did not know what kind of visas the applicants had applied for. He assumed that al-Bardawil had applied for a Norwegian national visa; however, Eltervaag suggested that, since al-Abadza has not previously applied, he has most likely applied for a Schengen visa from Norway.

¶3. (C) Eltervaag could not give us an indication of what the political decision will be on visa issuance and said that he honestly could not provide a time-line for a Norwegian decision. The fact that one of the applicants has not previously been denied a Schengen visa may add an extra wrinkle.

¶4. (C) Speaking to us earlier in the day, MFA Office Director Joern Gjelstad said that to issue a Norwegian national visa, it would be necessary for Norway to justify doing so on the grounds of overriding humanitarian reasons, national interests, or fulfillment of international obligations. Gjelstad gave his personal opinion that on face value, an application for a Norwegian national visa from one of the Hamas individuals should be refused, since none of these three criteria are objectively met in a way that overcomes the higher aim of Schengen solidarity. However, Gjelstad admitted that this is a highly political matter in Norway, and that the members of junior coalition partner Socialist Left party (SV) and many fractious Labor parliamentarians do not understand how Schengen works.

5 (C) Comment: This is crunch time for the Norwegian government. Will PM Stoltenberg and FM Stoere maintain solidarity with Norway's Schengen partners and hold course with Quartet views, or succumb to the left's domestic pressure to issue visas and meet with Hamas? Given that keeping the government coalition together is a extremely important goal for Stoltenberg, we cannot predict with any degree of certainty which way this decision will go, but we

will continue to urge that Norway not issue the visas.

Visit Oslo's Classified website:

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/oslo/index.cf>

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